

NOTiCIAS DEL OSO

March 31, 2010 #13

Ladies and Gents, I am pleased to announce that after a few minor transcriptions on my part this morning, TELPAS will officially be complete. It's quite the drawn-out test, I must admit, and I want to take the opportunity to once again thank all of the staff for their help insuring that our LEP students are appropriately challenged and accommodated for next year. A special thanks, of course, to the English department for their assistance with rating all of our writing samples this year.

Finally, with a little space to breathe, our ESL newsletters will resume. In light of the upcoming testing days, I've decided to offer up a little practical advice for keeping our students focused on reading and not causing a disruption during testing days.

2 days until the weekend!

Erin Van Sickle

Shelving Reluctance

I will - however reluctantly - admit that dealing with reluctant readers was a skill I had confidence in when I started teaching at Berry. In fact, before the year started, I recall speaking with more than one staff member about my wonderful successes as a literacy tutor in Missouri. It took less than a month into the year for me to realize that I had found a new type of reluctant reader in the ESL students I now faced. This newsletter will hopefully offer some tips and insights for 1) selecting readings for ESL students and 2) keeping their interest focused on the text when it needs to be - such as during a TAKS test day!

Selecting the Right Text

As anyone teaching reading or language arts will be glad to lament with you, reluctant readers are a common problem - especially in middle school, when reading is definitely not high on the coolness list. Of course, there are a few general guidelines to keep in mind:

- 1. Interest area** (ghost and witches, multicultural topics, soccer, and - of course - vampires)
- 2. High-action texts** - mysteries and ghost stories provide the suspense to keep them interested.
- 3. Encouragement and Environment Accommodation** - Showing pride in their achievement while providing a silent - or musically noisy, if that works better - environment for them to practice reading skills in.

These are the common tricks that I learned as a literacy tutor, and they normally actually do work - however I found myself discovering additional tricks and adjustments that appear to pertain specifically to ESL students.

4. Graphics - accompanied books

Eventually, realized that if I am asking students to draw pictures and graphic organizers to assist them in communicating their ideas then they may actually prefer to use graphics to help with the input as well. Being able to look at a picture every so often helps the students build confidence in their understanding of the text and validate the mental pictures they have created. A few examples of books that include occasional illustrations without lowering the difficulty or depth of text are: *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman or *The Looking Glass Wars* series by Frank Beddor.

5. First Language Inclusive Texts

I'm all for tricking the kiddos if it builds their confidence. Books that are actually at a high reading level that also include phrases from their first language boost the students' confidence far more than I ever expected the first time I tried this method. My favorite example is currently *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Munoz Ryan, a book that begs the students to think critically and ask questions - while at the same time making them feel like an expert because they understand the Spanish without needing to read the translation.

Retaining Attention!

Woohoo! We found a book they're interested in! Awesome! Now we can just sit back and let the love of reading flow through them, right? If only. While about 10% of my students truly are satisfied when they find the right book, the rest of them still become frustrated after less than half an hour of reading. These techniques have proved useful in my classroom and will hopefully help others as well.

- Mind Movie

Have the student stop reading about every 15-20 minutes and run through the events just read in their head like a movie. Tell them to make sure that they are completely focused, playing director to make sure that the events come out just right. Sounds corny and like an invitation for students to slip into a nap, but it works with a large percentage of my students, giving them a chance to analyze what happened in the reading as well as take a break from trying to struggle through the reading.

- Cartoon Strip Summary

Give the students a piece of paper with a comic strip outline drawn. Have them fill in the comic strip with either the main points of the book up to the point that they have read (similar to a flow chart but with more pictures, usually) or have them reillustrate in great detail the coolest scene in the book so far. I see the best results from the second option, and if I can ask them follow up questions to have them analyze why it's their favorite part, I give myself (and the student) bonus points for the day.

- Partner Parade

Have the students form two circles facing each other with an equal number of learners in each one. Every student in the outside circle should have a partner in front of them in the inside circle to begin. Have each student share a summary of the last 15 minutes/2 chapters/etc. with their partner and make a prediction about what important plot action will come next. After 5 minutes (about 2.5 minutes each), have the inside circle rotate to the left. Continue until you're out of time/students.

After trying all of these techniques, if they're still getting distracted, they probably just need more practice reading for extended periods of time. Hopefully, the bimonthly practice in my classroom will continue to build their reading endurance.

Good luck to the 8th grade
next week!